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RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000079

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: PREL PGOV AMGT MCAP SNAR VE

SUBJECT: FM'S CHIEF OF STAFF PROMISES ACTION ON RECIPROCITY
ISSUES

REF: CARACAS 00042

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Chief of Staff to the Foreign Minister Temir Porras met with the Charge January 19 to "turn the page" on ongoing MFA-imposed administrative impediments to normal diplomatic relations, provided the USG reciprocates in the United States. Porras pledged to issue and renew visas for personnel assigned to Embassy Caracas, to issue diplomatic carnets in a timely fashion, and to allow the importation of eight-cylinder for the Embassy's use. Porras urged the USG to issue visas to Government of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) military pilots seeking training on civilian aircraft in the United States, and suggested the GBRV would continue to hold up TDY visas pending resolution of this issue. He took on board the Charge's complaint that the Embassy is owed over \$300,000 in tax reimbursement, but said Venezuela's tax agency owes GBRV entities as well. Porras reiterated the GBRV wants to improve bilateral relations, despite policy differences. Porras and other GBRV officials have made but not fulfilled similar pledges in the recent past. Nevertheless, Porras appeared interested in sending the "right signal" to the new U.S. administration, even in the wake of President Chavez's recent sharp criticism of then President-Elect Obama (Septel). End Summary.

Turning the Page

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro's Chief of Staff, Temir Porras, called the Charge to a January 19 meeting in his office to follow up on reciprocity issues (Reftel). Porras said Maduro, MFA Protocol Director Gordils, and he met recently and decided to "turn the page" to address the Embassy's ongoing administrative problems caused by the MFA. Porras said he understood that the GBRV and USG would continue to have important policy differences. Nevertheless, Porras said the GBRV is now prepared to move quickly so long as the Department reciprocates with respect to the Venezuelan Embassy. The Charge stressed that the USG is interested in a normal diplomatic relation with Venezuela and in improving bilateral communication. He urged the GBRV not to interpret lack of policy agreement as a lack of respect.

¶3. (C) Porras referred to Iran as a specific example of the policy differences between the USG and GBRV. He hastened to add that the GBRV does not pose "any threat to the national

security of the United States," despite our different "geopolitical visions." He said the GBRV is hoping the USG will "change its perception" of the GBRV. Charge responded that the USG also hopes to improve bilateral relations. The GBRV's decision, however, to expel Ambassador Duddy in 2008 had a negative effect on bilateral relations. He also urged the GBRV to refrain from anti-American rhetoric.

Visas

¶4. (C) The Charge reviewed the Embassy's difficulties in obtaining visas for both personnel assigned to Embassy Caracas (PCS visas) and to officials who visit the Embassy on temporary duty (TDY visas). He urged the GBRV to separate the two types of visas and not to conflate the non-issuance of visas to Venezuelan military personnel seeking pilot training on civilian aircraft in the United States. Charge noted that the latter issue is subject to U.S. arms exports controls and involves more USG agencies than the State Department. He suggested the GBRV consider raising this issue in the context of potential bilateral, technical confidence-building defense talks.

¶5. (C) Porras said the GBRV is prepared to issue and renew pending PCS visas for Embassy Caracas, including for military personnel. The GBRV would not issue visas for any additional DEA personnel at this time, however. Porras asked for assurances that the Department would issue and renew pending visas to its personnel assigned to the United States. The Charge and Porras agreed to exchange diplomatic notes listing specific personnel awaiting PCS visas. In response to the Charge's urging, Porras pledged that the MFA would not hold up the flow of future PCS visa requests.

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¶6. (C) With respect to TDY visas, Porras said the GBRV remains concerned that the USG is not issuing visas to Venezuelan military pilots seeking training on civilian aircraft in the United States. While recognizing the GBRV is not in a position to apply a reciprocal measure, he said the GBRV is nevertheless linking this issue to USG requests for TDY visas. He urged the USG to show flexibility on this issue, noting that President Chavez is personally interested in a resolution. He said progress could clear the way for more substantive bilateral issues, including bilateral discussions on counternarcotics. He said the GBRV may be interested in technical-level defense talks, if there were a real perspective on the visa issue affecting military pilots.

Other Issues

¶7. (C) Charge raised other administrative difficulties that the Embassy is confronting, including the MFA's retroactive ban on the importation of eight-cylinder vehicles, delays in the issuance of diplomatic carnets, and reimbursement of over \$300,000 in value-added taxes. Noting that Embassy personnel are forced to drive for several months before receiving diplomatic license plates, Charge also urged the MFA to find a solution to avoid a potential incident. He stressed that the accumulation of these administrative difficulties is interpreted by the USG as official harassment.

¶8. (C) Porras pledged to allow the Embassy to import eight-cylinder vehicles designated for the Embassy's use. He also said the MFA would issue diplomatic carnets in a timely way, including for the PolCouns' son (pending since August 2008). Charge welcomed Porras's promise, but also noted that in the absence of prior progress, the Department has reassigned PolCouns and his son has departed Venezuela. Porras said he was unaware of the diplomatic license plate problem, but said he would look into it. With respect to tax

reimbursement, Porras noted that Venezuela's tax agency (SENIAT) owed GBRV entities, including the MFA, large amounts of tax "drawback." He urged the USG not to interpret GBRV inter-agency problems as harassment.

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